

PARASHAH: Pinchas (Phinehas)
ADDRESS: B'midbar (Numbers) 25:10-30:1(29:40)
READING DATE: Shabbat
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(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

Pinchas was a priest. He was a man of holiness. He was the grandson of Aharon, Moshe's late brother, so that also made him direct family. What was going through his mind as he watched the recent turn of events surrounding the people of Ba'al-P'or?

We have to imagine that growing up in a family such as his, that during his childhood he was given the opportunity to "soak up" holiness. Consistently, day in and day out, he was given a glimpse into the supernatural world of the awesome blessings of the God of all humanity! The Holy One had delivered the people from Egypt, from the clutches of slavery and bondage to themselves, never again to return! How then could he sit back and watch this blatant act of rebellion against the Torah of HaShem and not burn with righteous indignation on the inside?

He took action.

His spear became his instrument of justice, and in what I like to think of as a "moment of the Ruach HaKodesh" he stepped boldly into the office that was his. He interceded on the LORD's behalf by stopping the plague, which was sure to consume the people in HaShem's fury! For this, ADONAI rewarded him with a blessing!

“I am giving him my covenant of shalom, making him a covenant with him and his descendants after him that the office of cohen will

be theirs forever.' This is because he was zealous on behalf of his God and made atonement for the people of Isra'el." (B'midbar 25:12, 13)

A 'Zealot' Among Them

What is the source of Pinchas' righteous indignation and what is meant by the "covenant of peace" that HaShem grants unto him? These sh'eil'ot (Torah questions) have puzzled even the most brilliant of Sages (Ibn Ezra, Abravanel, Ramban, etc). It is worth looking into a few possible answers. I can assure you that the candidates are quite interesting.

The ancient Midrashim (homiletic stories) bring out a most fascinating detail in regards to this pasuk (verse) in 25:11.

"Pinchas son of El'azar, son of Aharon the cohen..."

Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky of 'Sichos in English' gives us our selection of sh'eil'ot u't'shuv'ot (questions and answers):

QUESTION: Our sages write [in the **Gemara**] that "Pinchas zeh Eliyahu" - "Pinchas is Eliyahu" - since Eliyahu lived generations after Pinchas, shouldn't the saying have been "Eliyahu is Pinchas"?

ANSWER: Eliyahu was one of the angels whom HaShem consulted when he said "Na'aseh adam" - "Let us create man" (B'reshet 1:26). Afterwards, the angel came to this mundane world clothed in the body of Pinchas and lived over 500 years to become the famous prophet Eliyahu. Consequently Eliyahu preceded Pinchas by many years.

Alternatively, when Pinchas killed Zimri, he also expired himself. At that time, however, he reached a spiritual level that merited him the name "Eliyahu" (a name is a life-force, see **Tanya**, Shaar Hayichud 1) through which he was enabled to return to earth. He continued, however, to be called by the name "Pinchas," although in reality "Pinchas zeh Eliyahu" - the person called "Pinchas" now had the life force of Eliyahu. Incidentally, according to the above it is understood why the Torah never identifies his father and mother. He is never mentioned as Eliyahu son of so and so, but known by the title "Naviy," "Tishbi," or "Giladi."

Pinchas performed an extremely violent and forceful act, so much so that the other tribes accused him of murder. Rashi quotes the **Midrash**; "She'hayu ha'shevatim meranenim acharav, ha'reitem et ben Puti zeh, shepitem avi aviv agalim le'avodah zarah harag nasi shevet be'Yisrael!" - "The other tribes were talking about Pinchas, 'Did you see this son of Puti (Yitro). His grandfather used

to fatten calves for idol-worship, [that is why he found within himself the capacity] to kill a prince of one of the tribes of Yisra'el!"

The **Chazal** (Sages of Antiquity) continue to speculate...

QUESTION: In the Torah the name Pinchas is written with a "yud," and according to the **Zohar** (237b) Pinchas with a "yud" has the numerical value of two hundred and eight, as does the name of the patriarch Yitzchak. What is the connection between Pinchas and Yitzchak?

ANSWER: The prophet Eliyahu encountered the false prophets of the idol Ba'al and challenged them to prove whose God was the true one. It was agreed that he and they would each prepare an offering, and the one whose offering would be consumed by a fire descending from heaven would be the representative of the authentic God. All their attempts to bring down fire were to no avail. When Eliyahu prayed, "Aneini HaShem aneini" - "Please God answer me" - a fire descended from heaven (see I Kings 18:19-40).

According to the Gemara (Berachot 26b) the three prayers of the day, Shacharit, Minchah, and Ma'ariv were originated by the patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov respectively, and the Gemara (ibid. 6b) says that one should be very careful with praying the Minchah services since Eliyahu's prayers were answered during the afternoon prayer of Minchah.

Consequently, his name is written with a "yud," indicating the parallel between him and Yitzchak, alluding to the fact that Pinchas, who is Eliyahu, would be answered in his confrontation with the false prophets when he would recite Yitzchak's prayer - Minchah.

These answers, while attempting to teach us a didactic lesson, nevertheless are somewhat fanciful. I personally like the answer given by a modern scholar by the name of Rabbi Zalman Baruch Melamed of Beit-El Yeshiva (Yeshiva.org.il) in Isra'el:

One's intellect is the source of his moral character and personality. Only after one appreciates that that which is good is truly good, does he begin to yearn for it - and as a result act towards achieving that end. Human intellect is beyond emotion; in fact, it actually guides and even directs emotion. An act of "jealousy" on behalf of God, however, does not stem from the intellect. Man possesses a quality even higher than the intellect; it exists on the subconscious level, in the depths of one's spirit; it constantly strives to reveal itself and to appear via the intellect and emotion. The role of intellect and emotion is to neutralize those factors that block the manifestation of zealotry. [This model is used by Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook (of blessed memory) to explain the phenomenon of Emunah, or

faith. He stresses that emunah exists on a plane above and beyond intellect and emotion].

It is from these depths that jealousy must spring; this jealousy - or zealotry - reveals itself once one puts aside all factors that inhibit the manifestation of his inner cleaving to the Creator of the Universe. This zealotry responds to any even slight manifestation of Hillul HaShem, or desecration of God's name. Zealotry that has its roots in an understanding of the Divine - inspires the "zealot" to reach a state of completion - or Sheleimut: "Behold, I am giving him My covenant of Peace" (Shalom).

In Tractate Sanhedrin, our sages enumerate the deeds, which, if done by a Jew, warrant "Zealots smiting him." For example, "One who steals a vessel for use in the Temple... one who has relations with a Gentile woman..." and - even a Cohen who serves in the Temple while in a state of ritual impurity - are legitimately attacked and killed by zealots. The reason for Torah-sanctioned vigilance in these kinds of cases? The direct offense committed by the transgressor, who himself has stricken at the heart of the bond between the Children of Israel and the Holy One, Blessed be He.

Our sages explain that true zealotry may be defined as a situation in which the zealot does not inquire of a scholar how to act in the case at hand; in fact, should he make such an inquiry, a scholar would be bound not to instruct him to take action. Why? The very question as to how to respond indicates that the person has not internalized the level of zealotry required to permit his unilateral action. True zealotry flows naturally, from an inability of the person to tolerate the desecration of God's name. A well-known Torah dictum states that in situations of desecration to God's name, one does not allot honor even to a Rabbi.

Zealous for the sake of God's Holy Name. This was the supremacy of Pinchas' fury. Even though what he did was not considered "peaceful" in our eyes, nevertheless the Almighty awarded him the peace prize as a cohen (priest).

The Priesthood Established: Past and Present Offices

That God himself established the priesthood is of course well known from other passages. To be sure, recalling certain recent events in the life of 'Am Yisra'el, according to Numbers 16:5 the Levitical priests were commissioned by HaShem, separated unto God, and were allowed to approach God:

"Then he said to Korah and all his followers: 'In the morning the Lord will show who belongs to him and who is holy, and he will have that person come near him. The man he chooses he will cause to come near him.'"

The Levitical priesthood began with the tribe of Levi and proceeded through the sons of the family of Aharon (Aaron), according to Numbers 18:1,8 and Exodus 28:1, which says, "Have Aharon you brother brought to you from among the Isra'elites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, El'azar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests." However, physical blemishes disqualified any male descendant of Aharon, according to Leviticus 21:17-23, from which 21:17 is presented: "The Lord said to Moshe, 'Say to Aharon: 'For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God.'"

The duties of the Levitical priesthood included: the teaching of the Torah, Leviticus 10:11; offering the sacrifices, Leviticus chapter 9; maintaining the Tabernacle and the Temple, Numbers 18:3; officiating in the Holy Place, Exodus 30:7-10; inspecting ceremonially unclean persons, Leviticus chapters 13 and 14; they adjudicated disputes, Deuteronomy 17:8-13; they functioned as tax collectors, Numbers 18:21,26; Hebrews 7:5.

As great and awesome as their responsibilities were, the priests' job was only temporal. Ultimately their place in the community was to point the way to a future Cohen Gadol (High Priest) that would "bring to a fullness" their own office.

Yeshua HaMashiach is the ultimate and final Cohen HaGadol, and as such, he is possessor of the final "Covenant of Shalom!"

Why, even the great Torah personage Malki-Tzedek (Melchizedek) pales in comparison to Yeshua! Consider:

The name "Mel-chiz-ed-ek" (KJV) or "Malki-Tzedek" as it is written in the Hebrew, means, "my king is righteousness," or "king of righteousness." He is first mentioned in the Torah in the book of Genesis, in a meeting with the patriarch Avram. Chapter 14 verses 18-20 reads, "Malki-Tzedek king of Shalem brought out bread and wine. He was *cohen* [priest] of *El 'Elyon* [God Most High], so he blessed him with these words: "Blessed be Avram by *El 'Elyon*, maker of heaven of earth; and blessed be *El 'Elyon*, who handed your enemies over to you." He is again mentioned in the highly messianic Psalm 110 at verse 4. Finally he figures in the New Covenant book of Hebrews at Chapter 5:6,10,20; and is the subject of Chapter 7.

Although the Torah mentions him receiving the tithe from Our Father Avraham, in contradistinction to Pinchas, no record of his official lineage (i.e. to king and to priest) is given in the immediate text. This absence has caused no small speculation on the part of the rabbis of antiquity. Especially since in Judaism the roles of king and priest are separate roles! Normally (excluding the first king, Saul of Kish), the kingly line runs through Dah-vid (David). Accordingly, the

priestly lineage is traced through Aharon the brother of Moshe. To be sure Pinchas is of this lineage.

But Malki-Tzedek was both king (of Shalem) and priest (of HaShem the Most High). How is this possible? I believe, initially HaShem alluded to the answer in the prophecy stated about the Messiah in Psalm 110. This should have tipped the rabbis off about HaShem's provision of a future ruler who would belong to both the priestly and kingly lines. If the rabbis could have only read Hebrews, they could have seen that only one person in history ever fulfilled both of these roles and his name is **Yeshua!** If the rabbis of today would do the same, I believe the same conclusion would be reached!

But the book of Hebrews says something else about this "man" Malki-Tzedek that is very peculiar indeed. In Chapter 7:3-8, it is stated, "There is no record of his father, mother, ancestry, birth or death." It does **not** state that he **never** had any of these, nor that he **is alive forever more**. It says he is "testified to be still alive," which means "*midrashically*" (for teaching purposes only), not literally. Even the **Babylonian Talmud** has him identified as the son of Shem, Noah's son (Talmud Bavli, N'darim 32b). The Torah only leads us to that seeming conclusion without explicitly stating it. We need to be careful when interpreting the text here. Do not make it say something it does not. But by seeing in Malki-Tzedek our Messiah Yeshua, the connection is strengthened as to his (Yeshua's) role as both king and priest! To be sure, I believe that's exactly what the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) had in mind when he inspired King Dah-vid to make the messianic prophecy about his future ancestor.

Another feature of the priests is worthy of comparison with Yeshua, and that is their longevity in office. Levitical priests served for 25 years, from age 25 to age 50, according to Numbers 8:24,25.

Other than the family of Aharon, there were three other family lines in the tribe of Levi (Numbers chapter 4): the Kohathites, who maintained the furniture, vessels and veil of the Tabernacle; the Gershonites, who maintained the coverings, hangings and doors of the Tabernacle; the Merarites, who maintained the supports, including the planks bars and cords, of the Tabernacle.

Initially, HaShem had selected the entire nation of Isra'el to be his priests, according to Exodus 19:5,6; however, after the nation proved to be inadequate as priests, Exodus 32:7-10, the Levites who supported Moshe in Exodus chapters 26-28 were selected as HaShem's priests, Numbers 3:5-9.

But the Book of Hebrews again tells of a "transformation" of the priestly lineage. Again, let us examine the details of the Levitical priesthood and compare them to Yeshua.

According to I Chronicles chapter 15, 16:4-6, 37-43, Dah-vid rearranged the Levitical priesthood into 24 courses (orders); he assigned 16 courses to El'azar, and 8 courses to Ithamar. This rearrangement was chartered because of a population explosion in Dah-vid's reign.

According to Numbers 20:28, the office of the high priest was transmitted upon death to the oldest living son of the high priest: "Moshe removed Aaron's garments and put them on his son El'azar. And Aharon died there on top of the mountain. Then Moshe and El'azar came down from the mountain." And according to Numbers 25:10-13, HaShem made a covenant with Pinchas, the eldest son of El'azar, which guaranteed a lasting priesthood with the Aharonic line.

The line switched during Saul ben-Kish's reign; Eli, a descendant of Ithamar, assumed the office of high priest, however, he functioned only *de facto* and not *de jure* (legally). In fact, his descendants were removed from the priesthood because of Eli's failure to censure his sons, I Samuel 2:23-25; 3:13. Shlomo (Solomon) restored the Aharonic line to the high-priesthood; he replaced Abiathar, Eli's descendant, with Zadok, from the line of El'azar, I Kings 2:26,27,35. During the ministry of the prophet Yirmeyahu, Seraiah was the high priest; he was taken prisoner and executed by Nebuzar-adan, II Kings 25:18-21. Seraiah's son, Josedech, was not allowed to function as high priest. Instead, he lived and died as a prisoner in Babylon, Haggai 1:1,14. Josedech's son, Y'hoshua (Joshua), functioned as the high priest during the ministry of Zechariah, Zech. 3:1.

But what does Hebrews now teach us?

11 Even though the Law of Moses says that the priests must be descendants of Levi, those priests cannot make anyone perfect. So there needs to be a priest like Melchizedek, rather than one from the priestly family of Aaron.

12 And when the rules for selecting a priest are changed, the Law must also be changed.

13 The person we are talking about is our Lord, who came from a tribe that had never had anyone to serve as a priest at the altar.

14 Everyone knows he came from the tribe of Judah, and Moses never said that priests would come from that tribe.

15 All of this becomes clearer, when someone who is like Melchizedek is appointed to be a priest.

16 That person wasn't appointed because of his ancestors, but because his life can never end.

17 The Scriptures say about him, "You are a priest forever, just like Melchizedek."

18-19 In this way a weak and useless command was put aside, because the Law cannot make anything perfect. At the same time, we are given a much better hope, and it can bring us close to God.

20-21 God himself made a promise when this priest was appointed. But he did not make a promise like this when the other priests were appointed. The promise he made is, "I, the Lord, promise that you will be a priest forever! And I will never change my mind!"

22 This means that Jesus guarantees us a better agreement with God.

23 There have been a lot of other priests, and all of them have died.

24 But Jesus will never die, and so he will be a priest forever!

25 He is forever able to save the people he leads to God, because he always lives to speak to God for them.

26-27 Jesus is the high priest we need. He is holy and innocent and faultless, and not at all like us sinners. Jesus is honored above all beings in heaven, and he is better than any other high priest. Jesus doesn't need to offer sacrifices each day for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. He offered a sacrifice once for all, when he gave himself.

28 The Law appoints priests who have weaknesses. But God's promise, which came later than the Law, appoints his Son. And he is the perfect high priest forever. (Hebrews 7:11-28, Contemporary English Version [CEV])

The closing blessing is as follows:

***"Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-'Olam,
asher natan lanu Toraht-emet,
v'chay-yeh o'lam nata-b'tochenu.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn."***

(Blessed are you O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have given us your Torah of truth,
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.

Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
(Ameyn.)

“Shabbat Shalom!”

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